

**Remarks Following a Meeting With Democratic Congressional Leadership**  
*May 13, 2009*

Thank you, Madam Speaker. Good morning, everybody. This is a gorgeous day and an encouraging day, because we just wrapped up, as the Speaker said, a extremely productive meeting with the chairmen of the relevant committees, as well as the Majority Leader and Vice President Biden, to discuss one of the key pillars of a new foundation for our economy, and that is affordable, accessible, high-quality health care for all Americans.

I want to take a moment before I start talking about health care just to congratulate Chairman Waxman and the Energy and Commerce Committee Democrats, who've made such extraordinary progress in reaching a deal on comprehensive energy reform and climate legislation. This is a major step forward in building the kind of clean-energy economy that will reduce America's dependence on foreign oil. And I once again call on Congress to send me legislation that places a market-based cap on carbon pollution, which will then drive incent for the kind of innovation and dynamic, new clean-energy economy that can create jobs and new businesses all across America.

So this is an example of the extraordinary productivity that we're seeing over in the House right now. On health care, as Speaker Pelosi just mentioned, the House is working to pass a comprehensive health care reform bill by July 31st, before they head out for the August recess. And that's the kind of urgency and determination that we need to achieve what I believe will be historic legislation.

As I've said before, and as all Americans know, our health care system is broken. It's unsustainable for families, for businesses. It is unsustainable for the Federal Government and State governments.

We've had a lot of discussions in this town about deficits, and people across the political spectrum like to throw barbs back and forth about debt and deficits. The fact of the matter is, the most significant driver by far of our long-term debt and our long-term deficits is ever-escalating health care costs. And if we don't reform how health care is delivered in this country, then we are not going to be able to get a handle on that.

Now, in addition to the implications for the Federal budget, obviously, we're also thinking about the millions of American families out there who are struggling to pay premiums that have doubled over the last decade—rising four times the rate of their wages—and 46 million Americans who don't have any health insurance at all.

Businesses are using money to pay their rising health care costs that could be going to innovation and growth and new hiring. Far too many small businesses are dropping health care altogether. In fact, you've got small-business owners who can't afford health care for themselves, much less for their employees. And as we learned yesterday, pressures on Medicare are growing, which only underscores the need for reform.

That's why we've got to get this done. We've got to get it done this year. We've got to get it done this year, both in the House and in the Senate. And we don't have any excuses; the stars are aligned.

Now, the problems in our health care system didn't emerge overnight. We've debated about what to do about them for decades, but too often efforts at comprehensive reform have fallen apart due to special-interest lobbying and petty politics and the failure of all sides to come together. What's been so encouraging this week is you're starting to see a shift in these patterns.

On Monday, I met with representatives of the insurance and the drug companies, doctors and hospitals, and labor unions, groups that included some of the strongest critics of past comprehensive reform proposals. We discussed how they're pledging to do their part to reduce our Nation's health care spending by 1.5 percent per year. Coupled with comprehensive reform, this could result in our Nation saving over \$2 trillion over the next 10 years, and that could save families \$2,500 in the coming years, \$2,500 per family.

Yesterday, I met with CEOs from some of America's leading corporations who are finding innovative ways to cut their own health care costs by improving the health of their workers through prevention and wellness programs.

In the coming weeks and months, I believe that the House and Senate will be engaged in a difficult issue, and I'm committed to building a transparent process to get this moving. But whatever plans emerge, both from the House and the Senate, I do believe that they've got to uphold three basic principles: first, that the rising costs of health care have to be brought down; second, that Americans have to be able to choose their own doctor and their own plan; and third, all Americans have to have quality, affordable health care.

These are the principles to which I'm committed. These are the principles to which the chairmen and the Speaker and the Majority Leader, my Vice President are committed. We're seeing now that traditional opponents of health care reform are embracing these ideas. They recognize that the time is now.

And so I am just deeply encouraged. And I want the message to go out all across America, we are not going to rest until we've delivered the kind of health care reform that's going to bring down costs for families, and improve quality, affordability, accessibility for all Americans.

So, thank you very much, and enjoy this wonderful weather.

NOTE: The President spoke at 10:20 a.m. on the South Drive at the White House.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Congress :: Democratic Congressional leaders, meeting.

*Locations:* Washington, DC.

*Names:* Biden, Joseph R., Jr.; Pelosi, Nancy; Reid, Harry; Waxman, Henry A.

*Subjects:* Budget, Federal : Deficit; Budget, Federal : National debt; Business and industry : Preventive health and wellness, employer-based incentives; Business and industry : Small and minority businesses; Congress : House of Representatives :: Speaker; Congress : Members, meetings with President; Congress : Senate :: Majority leader; Economy, national : Strengthening efforts; Employment and unemployment : Job creation and growth; Energy : Alternative and renewable sources and technologies; Energy : Foreign sources; Energy : Greenhouse gas emissions, regulation; Environment : Carbon pollution; Health and medical care : Cost control reforms; Health and medical care : Employer-based health insurance coverage; Health and medical care : Medicare and Medicaid; White House Office : Vice President.

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